

# Educational Experience of Scheduled Castes and Tribes

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*The argument that education introduces bourgeois values among the oppressed, and thereby curbs their potential for radical expression, is based on the impart of education on an extremely small minority perceived from the point of view of non-SCIST educators; and both the tone and the substance of the claim show a wrong choice.*

*In a society where bourgeois values have high prestige, the acceptance of such values by a few members of oppressed groups can hardly be seen as a sign of regression, unless we insist on ignoring the point of view from which the oppressed would look at their own successful brethren.*

*What we should be worried about is not the fate of this tiny minority, but that of the vast numbers of SC and ST children who stop going to school long before the carrot of a middle class job can appear before them, and whose brief and demeaning educational experience merely proves to them that they are what they were alleged to be.*

*The experience of education, under prevailing curricular norms, serves to assist SC and ST children to internalise the symbols of 'backward' behaviour.*

THE paper is divided into five sections. The first section presents a theoretical background of the problems relating to the representation of knowledge in the curriculum and the distribution of this knowledge among different groups that comprise the clientele of an education system. In the second section, I discuss the state of research into the educational experience of the SC and ST. The third section presents some curricular data indicative of the quantity and manner in which the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are represented in the curriculum. The following section presents a report of teacher-student interaction in a history lesson, along with a discussion of this report from the point of view of a ST student. The final section deals with option for change. It also clarifies the argument presented in this paper against a background of the claim some researchers have made that education imparts bourgeois values to SC and ST children.

I

## Knowledge and the Curriculum

In this section I will discuss the problems involved in the representation of knowledge in the school curriculum. These problems may not occur to educators who regard curricular knowledge as "a received body of understanding that is 'given', even ascribed, and is predominantly non-negotiable" (Eggleston, 1977: p 52). From their perspective, the curriculum is merely a

logical packaging of facts. I wish to pursue the counterargument that the curriculum not merely packages knowledge but reorganises it.<sup>1</sup> With the help of a prescribed curriculum, the school distributes to its clientele a selection of available knowledge. The processes of both selection and distribution involve aims and criteria which vary for different groups within the clientele. The problems involved in the representation of knowledge in the curriculum can be identified by matching the needs and aspirations of different groups within the school's audience with the characteristics of the knowledge distributed by the school.

That the school's clientele consists of distinct groups is obvious. What is not so obvious is that the differences among the groups can affect the character of the knowledge available at school. The differences among the groups are socio-economic and cultural. The sharper these differences, the more significant will be the process of selection and representation of knowledge. A school or system which carefully selects its students and accepts only those who, belong to an identifiably distinct socio-economic or cultural group does not face much difficulty in selecting and representing the knowledge appropriate for the group. But a school or system which selects children from two or more socio-economic and cultural groups, or else admits students' on an unrestricted basis, is likely to encounter problems in selecting and representing knowledge in the curriculum. In short, highly

selective admission process makes representation of knowledge an easier task.

Before giving examples of the two kinds of school systems, I wish to clarify the processes of 'selection' and 'representation' of knowledge. Selection involves choice of data, which include information and symbols; and representation primarily involves the choice of perspective or point of view. The body of available knowledge is vast; any system aimed at imparting knowledge has to make a choice of areas in which it will impart knowledge, and within these areas the system has to make a choice of data. As Warnock (1977) says, "by far the most important question that can be raised about education is the question what to teach". To some extent, 'subjects' for study offered by a school stand for areas of knowledge that the school has chosen to impart. This choice is often made on the basis of tradition; few schools give fresh thought to the problem. Yet, new 'subjects' have to put up a hard and usually long struggle to gain entry in the curriculum, and such struggles often end in failure. A good example is the struggle made under the auspices of 'basic education' to gain recognition for manual skills as a valid school subject. Despite the backing of no less a person than Mahatma Gandhi, the struggle ended in failure. The example shows that the presence of a subject anions the areas of knowledge dealt with by a school system depends not on inventive ideas put forward by

influential individuals but the status of those social groups whose life and aspirations are mirrored in the subject. Productive manual skills represent low-status groups of Indian society, and that is why such skills could not realistically become a part of certified knowledge.

Once the areas of knowledge and data within them have been selected, the next problem the school faces is that of representing these data. Finding a language (e.g., vocabulary and images) to represent the data is of course a major problem involved in the translation of knowledge into curriculum, but the more immediate and crucial question is: 'From whose point of view will the data be presented?' A 'point of view' represents not one person, but a structure of interests which include behavioural traits, styles of thought and the overall world view. All of these ingredients form a structure of interests of social groups seeking dissemination and perpetuation of their culture through education. The extent to which the curriculum of educational institutions will reflect the structure of interests of different social groups that form the institution's clientele will depend on the nature of relationships among the groups. Those enjoying power over others are likely to get a larger share of curricular representation; groups that lack power may either get only token representation or none at all.

We can compare the elite 'public' schools with government (central provincial, or local) schools in matters of selection and representation of knowledge. A 'public' school normally consists of a homogeneous group of students in the sense that they come from a single socio-economic stratum and they share the symbols, such as language, habits, possessions, etc; associated with this stratum. Neither in the selection nor in the representation of data significant enough to be included in the curriculum does the public school system face a serious problem. The selection follows a stable tradition which represents the interests (both political and behavioural) of the clientele. These data are represented in the curriculum from the point of view of a distinct social group which harbours no confusion about its identity.

On the contrary, a government school caters to a heterogeneous group of students, their socio-economic and cultural identities are many, and often in conflict with each other. For instance, the cultural identity of SC

students is not the same as that of the students belonging to families engaged in business, and the cultural identity of these families is different from that of students whose parents have a position in the bureaucracy. However, the contrast between the identities of students from business families and those from families of bureaucrats is likely to be less sharp than that between the students of SC and the other two groups, the areas and data of knowledge valued by businessmen may be largely acceptable to bureaucrats, but neither group would regard as valuable the areas and data of knowledge valued by SC.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the knowledge imparted by the school cannot be valuable to all in the same degree. The curriculum of a government school can either provide segments of knowledge valued by all groups within its clientele on a proportionate basis or it can choose to treat the data valued by socially dominant groups as symbols of knowledge and all other data as symbols of ignorance. The government school follows the latter course. The selection of knowledge it offers to pupils masquerade as 'given' knowledge, valid and valuable for all. The differential value of this knowledge for different groups and its selective character in dealing with the significant symbols of these groups become invisible.

## II

### Gaps in Research

It is hard to explain why nowhere in Indian deliberations since independence on the educational problems of the SC and ST has a proposal been made to look at the curriculum of education at different levels from the point of view of these two groups. The obvious question to pursue would have been: 'How accurate is the knowledge of Indian society that the curriculum offers in terms of data concerning the SC and ST?' One looks in vain at the discussion of curriculum policy in the report of the Education Commission (1964-66), at the elaborate methods enunciated by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) of preparing textbooks in various subjects, or at the proceedings of the several committees appointed by the government to reform the content and quality of textbooks. Policy documents simply do not acknowledge that the SC and ST deserve representation in the curriculum, that their life and worldview are part of India's culture and therefore should be treated as components of the

knowledge that the school disseminates.

Equally difficult to explain is the neglect in social scientific research of SC's and ST's claim to representation in curricular knowledge. In the case of ST students, the question of relevance of curriculum materials to tribal life and culture has been mentioned by a few researchers, but it has never been pursued in any depth or detail. Rathnaiah (1977) mentions in his study of Adilabad's tribal 'community that prescribed textbooks "do not contain anything pertaining to their society and culture" (p 151). Similarly, Srivastava, Lal and Lal (1971), in their study of the educational problems of the Saora children of Orissa, mention the content of textbooks as a factor responsible for the children's poor performance. According to this study, 95 per cent of the teachers and 91 per cent of the officers working in the area felt that the textbooks were unsuitable for Saora children. Hose (1972) also talks about the irrelevance of the content and teaching methods used for the education of tribal students. Such mentions can hardly be described as more than token acknowledgement of the problems posed by a curriculum that does not reflect the life and culture of students. The problem is political; it emanates from the rejection of the tribal worldview and life style by the non-tribal elite including those entrusted with the job of planning tribal education. In the context of the language question for tribal education, Pattanayak (1981) points out the political dimension of the search for a relevant curriculum:

A section of people in the government treat the tribal problem as one of law and order... aspects ultimately connected with the tribal life style are treated as transgression of laws promulgated by and for the non-tribals. The tribal is then punished for his cultural values, his life style and his ethos about which judgment has already been passed by a ruling society which has determined the 'mainstream' in its own image... There is no wonder that the tribal people are not keen to take advantage of an education which appears to them to be a calculated move to destroy their social fabric, (pp 87-88)

In the case of SC even a token acknowledgement of the problems created by a gap in the lives of students and the curricular representation of knowledge is rare. In an all-India study of SC students, Chitnis (1981) touches upon the level of difficulty faced by the students in understanding classroom instruction. Like most of the other data presented in this study, the data on this question paint a rosy

TABLE: 1: BACKGROUND OF CENTRAL CHARACTERS IN STORIES USED IN TEXTBOOKS

N of stories: 77  
 Number of stories in which the central character's background could be identified : 53

Identified Background	Frequency	Per Cent of Identified Backgrounds
King/queen; prince/ss	12	22.64
Farmer	4	7.54
Ascetic	3	5.66
'Poor'/jobless person	3	5.66
Student/disciple	3	5.66
Fisherman	2	3.77
Fruit/nut seller	2	3.77
Minister of a kingdom	2	3.77
Teacher	2	3.77
Trader	2	3.77
Tribal	2	3.77
Watchman	2	3.77
Army chief, Beggar, Courtier, Doctor, Pipe player, Hunter, Royal clown, Sailor, Servant, Smith, Tailor, Village overlord's wife, Village senior, Woodcutter	1 of each	1.88 in the case of each

picture. No less than 66 per cent of the school-level respondents and 75 per cent of the college level respondents are reported to have denied any difficulty in following classroom instruction. It is interesting to notice in the tables given in the study that the proportion of respondents who face no difficulty is substantially greater in educationally backward states, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, than in educationally forward states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Such quirks in the data are put into perspective by Tilak (1932 in his review of the study where he points out that "this too rosy picture to believe leads a serious reader to cast doubts on several aspects of the study starting from the size of the sample and the survey design to the capability of high school and under-graduate college students to answer more than 150 objective and subjective questions with any acceptable precision" (p 147).

One basis for concern regarding the inadequacy of curriculum could be the high drop out rate among the SC. Although it is well known that the drop out rate among the SC is higher than among other (except ST) children, no attempt has been made to relate this higher drop out rate to the differential appeal of the curriculum for SC and other children. Available statistics (e.g., Report, 1980) show that the difference between the proportions of SC/ST and non-SC/ST children enrolled at different levels is substantial, and that the difference increases as we move on towards higher levels of education. In considering such a comparison we must remember that the government has made provision for special facilities.

such as hostels, scholarship, and free textbooks for SC and ST students. Despite such extra-curricular appeals, the education system fails to attract the majority of SC and ST students at the middle and secondary levels, and fails to retain those who do enrol in an institution.

Of particular interest from the viewpoint of the role of curriculum in retaining students are studies of drop out rate among the SC at the higher stages of education. Kirpal (1978) made a case study of students selected for reserved seats at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. Out of the 13 candidates who were selected under reservation in 1973, 4 left at the end of the preparatory course, 1 left at the end of the first year, 2 withdrew from the following semester, and 1 was asked to leave. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commissioner's report for 1980 provides similar data on medical students at Raipur between 1964 and 1973. Out of the 42 students admitted for reserved seats during these years, 14 left the programme incomplete. Although one should leave room for considerable inter-state variation, the picture that emerges from available research, according to Karlekar (1975), is one of "low academic performance and a high rate of dropout" (p 180). Students who have survived in the system long enough to seek entry in advanced institutions such as the 'Indian Institute of Technology and medical colleges should be expected to have mastered survival skills. Should even they fail to survive in these advanced institutions (despite the promise of prestigious jobs in the not too distant

future), their educational preparation should be cited as the most likely cause of this failure. Yet, the 'blaming the victim' syndrome is so strong in sociological research in education in our country that the failure to remain in advanced institutions is attributed to the SC students' own inadequacies, and not to the inadequacies of the school curriculum to which they were exposed throughout childhood and adolescence. The remedies suggested invariably focus on the student rather than the school curriculum. The remedy prescribed by Karlekar (1975) goes further. It links the performance of SC students with their possessing a certain cultural asset which is rarely named with such facile candour in research writings on SC;

if two students fulfil the same minimum mark requirements and come from the caste for which a seat is reserved, preference should be given to the students whose families have a history of education and are generally from what M N Srinivas would call a *Sanskritised* background, i.e., where the family *mores* are somewhat in keeping with the dominant traditions of upper caste Hindu society.<sup>3</sup> (p 186)

### III

#### The Invisible People

If an examination of the curriculum and textual materials were to be made from the viewpoint of SC and ST, it could provide answers to the following questions:

Are the SC and ST represented?

Does the quantity of topics and materials representing SC and ST life, perspective, and problems correspond to the proportion of SC and ST in the population?

Which issues and symbols are chosen to represent the SC and ST?

How are relationships between SC/ST and non-SC/ST populations portrayed? What roles are used to portray such relationships in language (including literature), history, geography, civics and science textbooks?

To what extent do the structures of knowledge embedded in the curriculum represent the knowledge produced and developed by the SC and ST? Are the worldview, skills, and information which the SC have evolved featured in the curriculum?

While detailed answers to these questions must wait for research, a few glimpses available at present can be useful. In a 1980 study of the Hindi textbooks published by the Madhya Pradesh Textbook Corporation for classes four, five, and six, and the Hindi readers published by the NCERT for the

same classes.' I computed the social background of central characters of all story lessons. The findings, represented in Table 1, reveal that only 2 out of a total of 77 story lessons had central characters whose background could be identified as tribal, and no story had a central character identifiable as a SC. It is necessary to remind ourselves that taken together, SC and ST comprise one third of the population of Madhya Pradesh. The stories I looked at in the textbooks published by the MP Textbook Corporation are used in all recognised schools of the province, and the stories of the NCERT series were used in the Central Schools located in the province. The NCERT has now introduced new textbooks for the primary level, which carry several stories of the older series. As far as the representation of SC and ST in the background of the central character is concerned, the new series shows no change.

Let us examine the symbolic structure of the two stories in the Madhya Pradesh textbooks which have a tribal character in the central role. One of these is the famous Puranic myth of Eklavya, the Bhil youth who has to sacrifice his thumb to satisfy a Brahmin whom he regards as his teacher. The teacher requires this sacrifice to allay the jealousy that his princely disciples feel towards Eklavya for his self-acquired mastery of archery. The myth resolves the symbolic clash of caste backgrounds by upholding a pedagogical ideal: the pupil's obedience. In the other story, a tribal boy of Bastar saves a forest officer and a brigadier from being killed by a wild buffalo. The boy's courage and bravery are shown in a context in which an army officer acts as the audience and 'certifier'. In the structure of symbolically portrayed relationships in both stories, tribal boys depend on members of the dominant groups of non-tribal society for legitimisation of their achievements.

The implication that can be drawn from the study is that the SC and ST are unlikely candidates for being treated as central characters in story materials used for language teaching. If we consider materials prescribed for use in the curriculum as microcosms of society, then the SC and ST must be described as people who are invisible in the microcosms. On the few occasions when they do find entry in a prescribed text, they are likely to be depicted in subservient positions or as objects of patronage. In a lesson given in an elementary level Rajasthan textbook for civics, the teacher tells the class about a Harijan boy named

Chandu, "Look, how neat and clean Chandu appears today. We should not hate him."

The paucity of SC and ST symbols in the prescribed curriculum materials indicates the status of such symbols in the culture of schools which itself is a reorganised version of the cultural forms prevalent in society. The reorganisation involves selection and elimination of forms — including forms of knowledge and human behaviour. As Apple (1980) says, "the curriculum in schools responds to and represents ideological and cultural resources that come from somewhere. Not all groups' visions are represented and not all groups' meanings are responded to" (p 46). The groups whose visions and meanings are represented in the curriculum and text materials prescribed in India are the dominant groups in society. The visions and meanings held by the oppressed groups are cited as examples of backwardness and obstacles to progress.<sup>5</sup> In the structures of knowledge underlying the distribution of the syllabus into subjects, no place is given to the data generated by the encounters of the oppressed with their existential and social reality.

Curricular representation of symbols relating to different social groups is a significant index of the value attached to these groups in the cultural configuration that education helps to form and to transmit. As Anderson (1978) says, curriculum can be regarded as a cultural form "like house architecture, etiquette, the design of roadways, or modes of civic participation" (p 261). A curriculum which does not represent cultural data of all social groups in a proportionate manner can act as a means of aggression on groups whose data are excluded or are poorly represented. The children of such groups are forced to identify with the symbols of dominant groups, and thereby have to perceive themselves as backward. The education experience which is supposed to ameliorate the life of the SC and ST becomes a means of training the younger members of these groups to internalise their subservient position in society. It is true, of course, that whatever its content, education does assist individuals among the SC and ST to qualify for jobs traditionally inaccessible to them. It is also true that the success of such individuals can act as a source of inspiration for other individuals in these groups. Yet, for the majority of SC and ST children, the education available today is a discouraging and demeaning experience. This majority does not survive in the system long enough to qualify for status jobs reserved for them.

So far we have considered only the prefabricated aspects of curriculum. Precisely how a curricular item, along with the text written to explain or illustrate the item, translates into the currency of classroom interaction is a question that can deliver extremely useful knowledge regarding the manner in which the school socialises its clientele. Considering how rarely are classroom-interactions taken into account in educational and social research in our country, the report and discussion of teacher-student interaction in one classroom given below should serve a useful although limited purpose.

#### IV

##### How Learning Takes Place

The interaction between teacher and pupils reported and discussed in this section occurred during a history lesson in the eleventh class of a Central School. The medium of instruction was English, and the method of teaching consisted of lecturing interspersed with brief sequences of questioning by the teacher, sometimes to ascertain whether students had learnt the content of the day's lesson and at other times to bring a new sub-tonic into focus. Although no textbook was used or referred to during the class, the lesson was based on Ram Sharan Sharma's "Ancient India", a history textbook for the eleventh class published by the NCERT. The topic was socio-economic and cultural change during and after the Gupta period. The teacher's presentation covered the practice of land grants, changes in trade patterns, and the varna system, the rise of regional languages, shifts in forms of worship, and the emergence of tantricism.

The class consisted of 11 students, 18 girls and 9 boys of whom 2 belonged to the reserved categories; J to SC and 1 to ST. The first question asked by the teacher was answered by a girl sitting in the front ranks. As the girl was answering, the teacher noticed some disturbance in a corner of the rear ranks where the two boys of reserved categories and two other boys were seated. The teacher asked the SC boy to stand up, and then asked him a question. He could not answer, and he kept standing after the teacher had turned her attention to the front ranks where several girls were creating rather more disturbance — snapping fingers, crying "M'am, M'am" — in their eagerness to provide the answer. A minute or so later, a boy sitting in front of the SC boy whispered something to him. The SC boy hesitatingly sat down.

As soon as he did, the teacher noticed and told him that he had not been asked to sit down. The boy remained standing until five minutes later when the teacher had finished another part of her lecture and was starting a fresh sequence of questions.

Having told the SC boy to sit down, the teacher asked the class: "What is tantricism?" Several hands went up in the two front ranks, and the interaction between the teacher and the students who were allowed to answer questions went like this:

- S<sub>1</sub>: "Tantricism means belief in magic and superstition."  
 T: "What else do you understand from tantricism?"  
 S<sub>2</sub>: "M'am, it's a mysterious ritual and it's a sign of backwardness."  
 T: "Which areas were most affected by it — towns or villages?"  
 S<sub>3</sub>: "Villages."  
 T: "What type of villages were most affected?"

A few hands were raised in response to the last question. The teacher looked around, then asked one of the students who had raised hands to reply. The answer that came was, "Tribal villages were most affected by tantricism." The teacher nodded in agreement, and proceeded to explain how the contact between Brahmins and tribal people led to the former's adoption of tantric practices and beliefs. After dealing with this issue, she rephrased her earlier question, this time to ascertain that the topic had been learnt. The question was "Who did the Brahmins learn tantricism from?" Many students raised their hands, mumbling "M'am, Ma'm" in their keenness to offer the correct answer. The teacher looked towards the rear ranks where nobody had raised a hand. She asked the ST boy to stand up and reply. The boy stood up but could not provide the answer. The teacher translated the question into Hindi, but still the boy could not say a thing. Finally, the teacher asked one of the girls in the front ranks to reply, and got the answer she expected. The bell rang and the teacher hastened to complete the lesson by giving two questions to be answered in writing at home.

In the following discussion of this interactional data, I would like to focus on the ST boy. I will attempt to understand his response to the lesson at three levels, namely the levels of (i) language; (ii) meaning; and (iii) norms. The boy's response to the lesson at the level of language is relatively easy to guess because the teacher thought it appropriate to translate her question into Hindi for his convenience. Appa-

rently, she knew that the boy has difficulty comprehending English. The boy's difficulty in English should affect his response not simply to individual lessons, but to the entire routine and culture of the school. Although located in the Hindi region, the school gives place of honour to English as do all its counterpart Central Schools. At the lower levels, some teachers use Hindi, often mixing it with English. At the higher levels, nearly all teaching, except that of Hindi and Sanskrit, goes on in English. From the posters, captions under pictures, newspaper clippings, and notices hanging on walls, anyone can discern that the ethos of this school is steeped in English. The ST boy has to accept this condition for his education in this school.

At the level of meaning, one can ask: "Whose meaning and viewpoint are reflected in the curriculum?" The term 'curriculum' of course refers to the amalgam of the content of a topic, the manner in which the content has been codified in a textbook, and the manner in which the teacher's interaction with students ultimately shapes the transmission of the content. In the technical pedagogic parlance current in Indian circles of educational research and training, content, is treated as the core of curriculum, and nearly all critical as well as constructive action is confined to the textbook; the roles played by the teacher and the students, and the conventions of pedagogy they follow — out of habit or spontaneously — are totally ignored. The conventions I am referring to, under the wider rubric of curriculum, are learnt by the teacher during professional training, and are further internalised on the job through contact with colleagues and students who have already internalised their roles.

Let us first consider the content and its codified textbook version. Under the relatively recent reforms that have taken place in history teaching, socio-cultural data are given more attention than they received previously when history teaching was confined mainly to the chronology of rulers and their policies. However, the new pedagogy of history continues to present history as knowledge independent of a point of view. History is presented in currently used school textbooks as a body of facts, not as what Carr (1964) calls "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts" (p 30). History as facts induces the teacher to treat students as an undefined group; the social backgrounds to which they belong and the points of view these backgrounds shape become irrelevant when history is presented as

a body of facts. For the teacher dealing with history in this way, 'tantricism' becomes a sub-topic of the cultural history of ancient India; it ceases to be a problematic issue which touches upon group identities, and which, depending on its treatment, can influence present-day group and individual identities.

The textbook on which the lesson was based has this to say on the relationship between 'tantricism' and 'tribes':

The most remarkable development in the religious field in India from about the sixth century AD was the spread of tantricism. In the fifth-seventh centuries many brahmanas received *tand* in Nepal, Assam, Bengal, Orissa, central India and the Deccan, and it is about this time that tantric texts, shrines and practices also appeared. Tantricism admitted both women and sudras into its ranks, and laid great stress on the use of magic rituals. Some of the rituals may have been in use in earlier times, but they were systematised and recorded in the tantric texts from about the sixth century AD. They were intended to satisfy the material desires of the devotees for physical possessions and to cure the day-to-day diseases and injuries. Obviously tantricism arose as a result of the large-scale admission of the aboriginal peoples in brahmanical society. The brahmanas adopted many of the tribal rituals and charms, which were now officially compiled, sponsored and fostered by them, (p 172)

Apart from the confidence with which the origins of tantricism have been stated in this passage, it is interesting to observe the features that allow the passage to be interpreted in the manner which the teacher's use of it, as a basis for her class-preparation, reflects. Apparently, it is the use of verbs like 'arose' and 'adopt' that suggest a theory of contact between the 'brahmanical society' and the 'tribal' or 'aboriginal' peoples. It is interesting to examine the construing of this particular episode of ancient Indian history by other historians. "The esoteric nature of tantricism obscures its roots and rituals", says Wolpert (1977; p 95), "though it clearly seems to antedate Brahmanic Aryan religious concepts, harking back to ancient mother-goddess worship and Shaivite forms of worship". According to Zimmer (1969), "Tantra may have its roots in the non-Aryan, pre-Aryan, Dravidian soil" (p 62). Weber (1958) points out that "in *tantra* magic folk ecstasy made its entrance into Brahmanical literature" when "in the interest of their power position, the Brahmins could not completely ignore the influence of this magic" (p 295). Thapar (1966) takes a similar view, adding that "the emphasis on

*shakti* and the mother-goddess would suggest that Tantricism was rooted in pre-Aryan culture, which is not unlikely considering that it originated in essentially non-Aryan areas" (p 262). If the school textbook were using the terms 'tribal' and 'aboriginal' in a general, unspecific sense, perhaps one need not find the tone of total certainty in it (which contrasts with the tone of uncertainty in the other authors quoted above) a matter of great concern. But there is clearly no indication of the sense in which the terms 'tribal' and 'aboriginal' have been used, and in the absence of such an indication one cannot blame the teacher for using these terms to be understood in the sense of present-day tribal people.

Meaning is generated in the course of interaction, in this case between teacher and students; and whoever has the power to name or assign labels is able to determine the meaning of an interaction. In a pedagogical interaction, what meanings will be learnt by the pupil depends on the way in which power is used for assigning significance. In the interaction reported earlier, the teacher uses her power to place the ST boy in a situation where he acknowledges ignorance. His silence represents no denial of the validity of the knowledge he is being offered, whereas the teacher's articulateness represents the assertion of her knowledge (based on the textbook) as valid learning and of her power to make students accept it. There is no conflict between her authority and the ST boy's expression of ignorance. Her authority is used to prove to the boy and to the rest of the class that he is ignorant.

In the context of knowledge acquisition that takes place in schools, the question 'What is learnt by pupils' is no more significant than the question 'Who learns and who fails to learn'. The distribution, just as much as the content of school knowledge, offers a clue to the functioning of the school as a social institution. As a functionary of the school, the teacher treats the ST boy under the school's norms of undifferentiated delivery of knowledge. One of the norms that the teacher follows is to ask questions in order to check whether the students have learnt what they have been taught. As a part of their training, students of teaching learn that is *their* role to ask questions, and that the purpose of questions asked by the teacher is to enhance students' involvement. The history teacher was following this well-established norm in checking whether the ST boy had learnt the link between 'tantricism' and 'tribalism'. It just so happens that the question is

being posed to a tribal boy.

Whether the question is valid, in terms of accuracy of historical information reflected in it, is an irrelevant issue here.' What is of interest is to note that the ST student's options in the face of the question he has been asked are not real options in terms of his existence as a member of a recognised tribal group. If he answers the question by repeating what the teacher has told the class, he will acknowledge in an articulate manner that tribal groups are the source of those characteristics of the Indian society which have already been identified in the class as symbols of backwardness, such as belief in magic and superstition. Taking the other option, if he says nothing, he would show that he has not learnt well 'enough to reproduce what has been taught only a few minutes ago, and that he is indeed a backward student of this class. In other words, his 'success' as a student of a history lesson would prove his backwardness as a member of a group, and his 'failure' as a student would testify to his backwardness as a student. As a social institution, the school is helping the boy to acquire responses that match his description in society.

## V

### Conclusion

"It is no accident that the moment of transition from ruthless methods of imposition to more subtle methods is doubtless the most favourable moment for bringing to light the objective truth of that imposition" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; p xii). A prescribed curriculum is a means of subtle control; its 'strategies of control need to be examined from the viewpoint of those whose interests are either overlooked or manipulated by the curriculum through distorted presentation. This is the task that agencies and individuals anxious for change in the educational experience of the SC and ST will have to undertake. It will reveal the nature and extent of the 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) that the curriculum prescribed in schools does to the children of the two groups. Those conducting such research would have to go beyond the frequency of mentions made of the existence of the SC and ST. While it is important to know how many topics on the curriculum refer to the life of SC and ST, and to know how many symbols of their life a textbook offers, the mere counting of frequencies can be a trap as it prepares the ground for spurious reforms. As important as frequency counts is the need to identify

the perspective from which knowledge and symbols are represented and further, to probe the meaning which the knowledge and symbols might carry under actual socio-economic conditions.

An analysis can show us the state of curricular representation of the SC and ST, but it will not guide us in choosing between options for change. Only ideological considerations can facilitate this choice. There are two main options: a separate curriculum, or reorganisation of the common curriculum. The first option is commonly recommended for ST children, often under the name of 'relevance'. It is believed that a curriculum especially designed to meet the needs of ST children will have a greater appeal for them. Such a belief may well prove true, but it is based on a very narrow concept of 'relevance'. The worst weakness of the prevailing curriculum is not that it is unsuitable to the specific needs of SC or ST children, but rather that it provides a distorted view of social reality to *all* children. The problems of SC and ST children cannot be solved by changing their vision and allowing the vision of the rest of children to remain what it is today. What is needed is a change in the picture of society that education offers to all children, and this would require proportionate representation of different groups in the, auricular knowledge and symbols. A demand for proportionate representation would help curriculum decision-making become a matter of community dynamic rather than a mechanical process of bureaucratic imposition.

Change in curriculum would remain incomplete unless patterns of teacher-student interaction also change in the direction of coercion-free involvement of the SC and ST students. The knowledge of social reality that teachers bring to the classroom, and their perception of the role of education are among the key determinants of teachers' behaviour. To a great extent, the norms of teacher-student interaction are shaped by the training that teachers receive prior to employment. Knowledge of 'social reality' and the role of education under prevailing social conditions do form a part of present training curricula, but like much else in teacher training, these segments receive a ritualistic observance. Teachers cannot be oriented towards new types of classroom interactions without being exposed to specific issues of social reality and the functioning of the school. This is not happening at present.

Finally, it is necessary to clarify the

position taken in this paper against a background of the charge routinely made that education introduces bourgeois values among the SC and ST, and thus prevents the upsurge of radical consciousness of their oppression. This charge has taken many forms in the literature on the SC and ST. In his account of the changing life of untouchables, Isaacs (1965) said: "No new Ambedkars are appearing among the young, but a mass of self-engrossed people who are quickly and easily satisfied with the small gains they can win for themselves" (p 126). Other commentators have taken a similar position but have voiced it differently: some (e.g., Chitnis, 1981) bemoan the dependency that protective policies have supposedly created among SC students; and others (e.g., Patwardhan, 1973) find a wide gulf between the educated and the uneducated Harijans. Yet another expression concerning the negative effect of education, especially on SC, can be found among radical critics such as Jayaram (1983) and Class (1982). They both point out that preferential given educational opportunities, like all other components of protective discrimination, are a mere token, and an instrument for curbing disruption.

My argument in this paper has been that the experience of education, under prevailing curricular norms, can serve to assist SC and ST children to internalise the symbols of "backward" behaviour. The claim that education introduces bourgeois values among the oppressed, and thereby curbs their potential for radical expression, is perhaps based on the impact of education on an extremely small minority perceived from the point of view of non-SC/ST educators; and both the tone and the substance of the claim show a wrong choice. If it is true that education transforms a few SC and ST individuals into bourgeois, such a phenomenon cannot be used as a means to berate the uselessness of education to bring about change. In a society where bourgeois values have high prestige, the acceptance of such values by a few members of oppressed groups can hardly be seen as a sign of regression, unless we insist on ignoring the point of view from which the oppressed would look at their own successful brethren. As Omvedt (1983) points out in her critique of Glass (1982), the new dalit petite bourgeois "rarely forget their caste identity and its socio-economic basis". Evidence supporting this contention can be found in a study of the Harijan elite made by Sachchidananda (1976), which also shows why

it is wrong to criticise education for helping a few members of oppressed groups to become 'middle class'. What we should be worried about is not the fate of this tiny minority, but that of the vast numbers of SC and ST children who stop going to school long before the carrot of a middle class job can appear before them, and whose brief and demeaning educational experience merely proves to them that they are what they were alleged to be.

### Notes

- 1 This counter-argument is reflected in several recent studies of curriculum and classroom-interaction which use a 'sociology of knowledge' perspective to look at the process of instruction (e.g., Apple, 1980; Bernstein, 1971; Eggleston, 1977; and Lundgren, 1972).
- 2 It can be argued that SC are demanding the knowledge valued by dominant groups. Such demands are of course justified, but they do not compensate for the school's rejection of the knowledge which the SC have produced and developed in the course of their life experience and which continues to be significant to them.
- 3 Before making this suggestion, Karlekar says that the key problem of SC students is "one of socialisation into the dominant norms of an educational system based on learning by rote and cramming from notebook" (P 184). It would be fair to conclude that in Karlekar's view the personality attributes of a 'Sanskritised' background are abilities to learn by rote and to cram. If these are the abilities that SC students lack, one would hope that good institutions, emphasising thorough understanding rather than rote-learning, should find SC students especially preferable.
- 4 The core readers analysed were: *Aao Parhen our Sikhen, Aao Parhen aur Khojen*, and *Bharati* (part one). The first two of these have now been replaced by re-edited versions entitled *Bal Bharati*. For more details and methodology, see Kumar (1982a).
- 5 A story in a Madhya Pradesh Textbook, for example, shows a smith learning about his Tack of wisdom from a rich trader (Kumar, 1982b).

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